

SOUTH YORKSHIRE POLICE

From: Superintendent N G Bettison  
To: Chief Constable

Ref: NGB/ ☐  
Station/Dept: Headquarters  
Date: 9 November 1989

J. F. G. M.

**SUBJECT:** PRESENTATION TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ON THE SUBJECT  
OF THE HILLSBOROUGH DISASTER

On 3 October 1989 Mr Michael Shersby MP (Con), who represents the interests of the Police Federation in the House of Commons, visited the Force. His host was Paul Middup, and he was accompanied by his private secretary Mrs Hampton; by national and local representatives of the Federation's solicitors; by Tony Judge, Editor of the 'Police' magazine; and by Mr Coyles, Vice Chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales.

PC Middup sought permission for me to address the group on the subject of the Hillsborough disaster which you granted. To assist in this regard I compiled from the mass of video tape evidence a 31 minute chronology of the events. Mr Hayes was present throughout the presentation and stayed for the question/answer session that followed.

Over lunch that day, Mr Shersby asked Mr Hayes if I might be permitted to give the same presentation to an invited audience of Members of Parliament in London. Approval was subsequently given after Mr Hayes had discussed the request with you.

On 8 November 1989, by arrangement with Mr Shersby MP, I visited the Palace of Westminster. Mr Shersby had invited an audience of 40+ to hear the presentation. A total of 12 Members of Parliament were actually in attendance as follows:-

Mr Michael Shersby (Con)  
Mr Tom Pendry (Lab) - Chairman of the All Party Selection Committee  
on Football  
Mr David Evans (Con) - Member of that Committee and Chairman of  
Luton Town FC  
Mr Irvine Patnick (Con) - Member for Hallam  
Mr Joe Ashton (Lab)  
Mr Menzies Campbell QC (Con)  
Mr Keith Vaz (Lab)  
Mr Alan Meall (Lab)  
Mr John Greenway (Con) - believed Director of York City FC  
Mr Jim Couchman (Con)  
Mr Michael Lord (Con)  
Mr Martin Brandon-Bravo (Con)

Apologies were received from many Members who were detained on other parliamentary business.

In order to set the scene, I report as follows.

I set up my visual aids in Committee Room 14 at the Palace of Westminster. The room is a mini debating chamber with benches arranged along either side of the room. I positioned the video monitor so that it was facing just one side of the chamber. I accompanied Mr Shersby to the Members' Tea Room and, upon my return to the Committee Room, the Members were arranged (with the exception of one Conservative and one Labour Member

interposed) by Party - Labour on the left, Conservative on the right! The video monitor had been turned through 90° so that each 'side of the House' had an equal view. This seating arrangement set the tone for the presentation.

'Public' response to the presentation was devalued by posturing and rhetoric on all sides but, interestingly, I spoke to five members individually after the presentation (three Conservative, two Labour) and each warmly welcomed the input.

The most surprising volte face was by Joe Ashton who repeated 'in public' much of the invective that he has become famous for since the disaster, e.g. "the police have got to carry the can when they throw their weight about in deciding how football is going to be run and when it all goes wrong". The strength and monotonous persistence of Mr Ashton's remarks actually caused one Conservative member to throw down his papers and storm out of the Committee Room. However, Ashton actually returned to the Committee Room, 10 minutes after everyone else had left and whilst I was clearing my maps and photographs away. On this occasion he expressed his gratitude for my visit, hoped that I hadn't taken anything he had said personally and conceded that the Issues surrounding the disaster were complex ones. "..... but you can't blame us MPs for looking for simple solutions". I likened the Hillsborough disaster to the story of the blindfolded men feeling different parts of the elephant - everyone can get a different impression of the same beast if they don't take care to gather all the evidence.

Tom Pendry (Lab) stated that his Committee would be speaking with Lord Justice Taylor next week and thought the presentation was useful as a prelude to that meeting. This comment apart, much of what Pendry said, 'publicly', suggests that he has already made up his mind where blame for the disaster lies - with the South Yorkshire Police.

On the other hand, David Evans (Con) was scathing about the attitude of Sheffield Wednesday FC both before and after the disaster. Menzies Campbell (Con) confided that in his view Taylor had got it all wrong and, as far as he was concerned, he Intended to try to put the record straight.

Alan Meall (Lab) thought the presentation was some sort of propaganda exercise and wanted to know what the other 68½ hours of evidence depicted before he would adopt a position on what he had been shown. Keith Vaz (Lab) walked out before the end of the video!

All in all an interesting day, but I doubt whether any opinions have been changed.

Mr Shersby left the presentation for an audience with the Home Secretary, Mr David Waddington, (discussing the issue of police rent allowance). When he returned to the House, Mr Shersby mentioned privately that he had taken the opportunity to discuss the Hillsborough disaster presentation with the Home Secretary who expressed interest in seeing the video tape. Mr Shersby expects to see you at a Police Federation Dinner planned for 9 November 1989. For your information he intends to raise this matter with you at this time.

You will be aware that the debate on the Taylor Inquiry Report has now been postponed until the new year when the Final Report is published. At least two Conservative MPs expressed disappointment that the debate was not more imminent as they believed the passage of time will diminish the impact of their 'promised' attack upon the findings of the Interim Report.

N G Bettison

Superintendent